

Surgery of the Stone Age

A BALLAD OF NEOLITHIC TIMES

BY

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Surgery in the Stone Age.

[*A ballad of Neolithic times.*]

IN prehistoric days long since
There lived a Medicine-Man,
The general practitioner
Of a primeval clan.

A dolichocephalic head
Bespoke ancestral race;
A shaggy beard, which all afeard,
Completely hid his face.

But peering through that veil of
hair
Were two black, beady eyes,
To one not quite expecting it
A matter of surprise.

This Neolithic Medicine-Man
Held consultations free;
At sunrise, just outside his hut,
His panel you might see.

They came by ones, they came
by twos,
They came by threes and fours;
No matter what their illness was
They had to know the cause.

When they were all assembled
there,
The Medicine-Man appeared;
A silence fell on all around.
(I thought they would have
cheered.)

He looked them up; he looked
them down;
They all turned round about.
His ordering eye directed them,
Of that there was no doubt.

He made a sign all seemed to
know
And some fell promptly out—
Those under spells, in witchcraft
hells,
Their demons he must rout.

They stood a little group apart,
Till one fell in a fit.
I seemed to see him rub his hands.
(He had a cure for it.)

“ This patient must be *now*
trephined,
Let all the others go;
To-morrow when the sun is up
My magic I’ll them show.”

Two men the epileptic bore
And laid him on a trunk,
And when the wretch was coming
round
He showed some signs of funk.

No questions put they to the man ;
 The doctor cleared his throat,
 Then, bringing flints from out his
 hut,
 Took off his hairy coat.

A crowd had gathered all around,
 To watch the bloody deed ;
 Their curiosity was stirred
 To see his devil freed.

With sharp flint flake the surgeon
 made
 A cruciform incision ;
 The blood did spurt, the wound
 it hurt,
 The crowd laughed in derision.

The two assistants pressed the
 flaps
 To stop the blood from running ;
 The Medicine-Man did scheme
 and plan,
 He was so full of cunning.

He scraped the pericranium
 Until the skull was bare ;
 Then scratched the bone with a
 sharp stone,
 It did not matter where.

He scraped that bone and
 scratched and scraped,—
 The scratches made a groove,
 The groove a basin-like ellipse.
 The patient did not move.

The fact was this, when he came
 round
 So rotten did he feel,
 He fainted when he found himself
 The centre of such zeal.

The hollow soon became a hole,
 'Twas all but through the bone,
 His diploë, you well might see,
 But still he made no moan.

The inner table only now
 Protected his soft brain,
 One final scrape and he did make
 That hole a window-pane.

The devil stirred within his skull
 And, with a fearful yell,
 Escaped from out its prison-house
 To seek its own in hell.

The crowd excited by that yell
 Began to sing and dance ;
 You might have thought the
 Germans were
 A-running out of France.

The surgeon stood and looked
 around
 And silence once more fell ;
 Success was his, it was "good
 biz,"
 The demon was in hell.

The two assistants placed the flaps
 Upon the new-made hole,
 Delighted they had helped to save
 The epileptic's soul.

They dressed the wound with
 fresh green leaves,
 Thin bark on this they laid,
 And bound it round with long
 dry grass.
 (I wonder if it stayed.)

Triumphantly they carried him
 To a sequestered cave,
 And there they did the best they
 could
 To keep him from his grave.

By great good fortune he pulled
 round
 Without a septic trace,
 And in a fortnight he was out
 With smiles upon his face.

The tribe came out to welcome
him
And pedestal him high.
Trephined and epileptic both !
It made the envious sigh.

And others jealous of his place,
(Not epileptics they),
Forthwith went to that Medicine-
Man
To be trephined straightway.

And this now famous Magic-Man
Made riches more and more ;
Trephined the young, trephined
the old,
Trephined them by the score.

[The skull of one of these you'll see
In our fair London city,
Lancaster House, *late* Stafford
House.
(The change I think a pity.)]

He lived this epileptic did,
They all thought him divine ;
They brought him goats and
cheese and fruit,
They deluged him with wine.

He was so great that others
wished
To be like him, divine,
If epileptics they were not—
There still was the trephine.

And that accounts for all those
skulls
With artificial holes,
We find in Neolithic caves.
They wished to save their souls.

If great they were upon this earth,
Far better it would be
For them in that fair hunting
ground
Of immortality !



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